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FOLLOW-UP TO THE WORLD CONFERENCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Written statement submitted by the International Federation of Action of Christians for the Abolition of Torture, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[3 March 1998]

"A commitment, not a memory!"

1. The action of its 27 affiliated associations on 4 continents encourages the International Federation of ACAT (Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture) to urge all the members of the Commission on Human Rights to make sure that the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights does not signify mere remembrance of a past gesture but provides an opportunity of undertaking actually to implement the commitments entered into by each State.

2. In many areas, the gap between States words and deeds is widening. The Programme of Action adopted in Vienna in 1993 by all the States Members of the United Nations has only partially be filled. While groups working to defend human dignity come up with courageous initiatives and commit themselves in ever greater number to the promotion of human rights, the States do not seem to have made this struggle a priority. This failure to act discourages public opinion and increases scepticism about international instruments and the bodies responsible for implementing them.

3. In its resolution 1997/69, the Commission recalled that "special attention should be paid to assessing the progress towards the goal of universal ratification of international human rights treaties and protocols adopted within the framework of the United Nations". FIACAT asks the Commission to go beyond mere assessment and, in a resolution, to invite all States that have not yet done so to ratify these instruments without reservation (in particular, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, with its two protocols, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment) and to cooperate with the United Nations mechanisms for ensuring that these instruments are put into practice.

4. The Declaration of the World Conference on Human Rights called upon Governments "to incorporate standards as contained in international human rights instruments in domestic legislation and to strengthen national structures, institutions and organs of society which play a role in promoting and safeguarding human rights" (A/CONF.157/23, paragraph 83).

5. FIACAT emphasizes the importance of this declaration and the need for the Commission to make sure that it is implemented. That is why it asks for States to be reminded of the legislative and regulatory work they have to do in order to incorporate international provisions into their domestic laws. Furthermore, given the monitoring and checking role of the working groups and rapporteurs, it asks for mandates expiring in 1998 to be renewed (for example for the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions and the Special Rapporteur on questions relating to torture).

6. Various draft international instruments, the rapid completion and adoption of which had been recommended by the World Conference on Human Rights, are still being drawn up. On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the fifth anniversary of the

Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, FIACAT asks the Commission to invite the States to adopt a positive and constructive attitude with a view to concluding the examination of the following drafts:

- the draft concerning the setting up of an International Criminal Court, which would be truly independent and with enough resources to dispense justice;

- the draft of an optional protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, FIACAT asks for the next meeting of the working group in charge of drawing up this document to run for three weeks in order to allow real progress to be made;

- the draft declaration on the right and the responsibility of individuals, groups and bodies in society to promote and protect human rights and universally recognized fundamental freedoms. Defenders of human rights must be protected and the Commission should condemn States which oppose or slow down ongoing discussions on this subject.

7. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 was the reflection of an aspiration, "the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy ... freedom from fear and want". As we approach the new millennium, the achievement of this goal has become a matter of extreme urgency. Many people are valiantly working towards it and do not understand why all Governments do not make a full commitment; let 1998 be the year for showing that they really do.

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